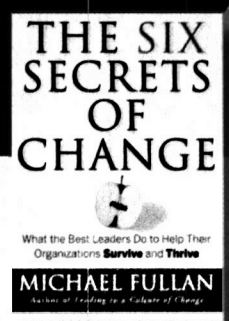


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The Six Secrets of Change

The way to weather uncertainty is to build an organization that is constantly transforming itself. Here's how.

BY MICHAEL FULLAN



Nothing may be more important in the 21st century than learning to manage change. In his latest book, “change agent” Michael Fullan draws from decades of experience in international education reform to reveal his own six secrets on managing change. These “secrets” are not so much great mysteries as deceptively simple truths, which, as Fullan says, are hard to grasp in-depth and extremely difficult to act on in combination. The challenge is to learn them and share them within your organization.

1 SECRET ONE: LOVE YOUR EMPLOYEES
A new report from McKinsey & Company focusing on the top-performing school systems in the world provides the central reason why we must value employees (in this case, teachers) as much as customers (children and parents): “The quality of the education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007).
One of the ways you love your employees is by creating the conditions for them to succeed. As George Bernard Shaw observed: “The difference between a flower girl and a lady is not how she behaves, but how she’s

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treated." Granted, there is a little more to it than that. Loving your employees means helping them all find meaning, develop their skills, and derive personal satisfaction from making contributions that simultaneously fulfill their own goals and the goals of the organization.

② SECRET TWO: CONNECT PEERS WITH PURPOSE

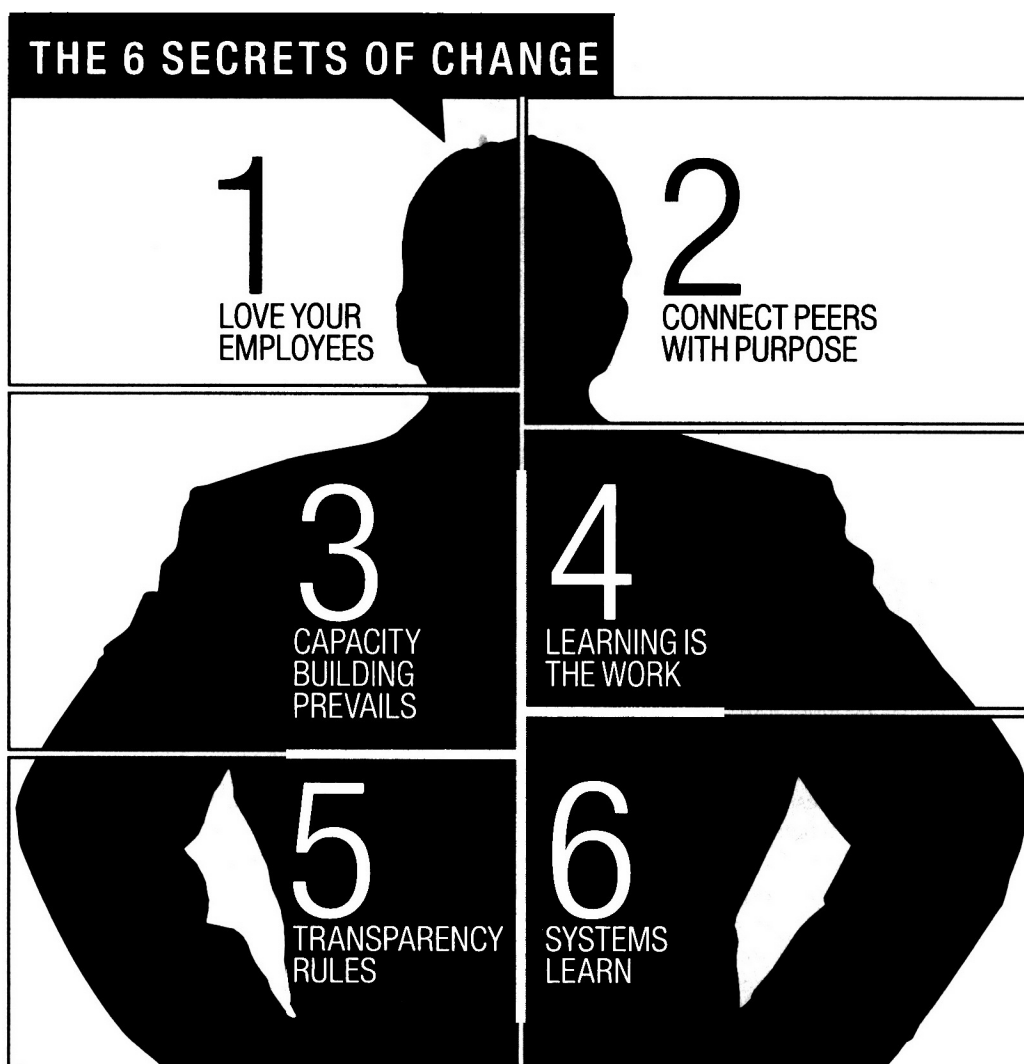
What is the optimal role of leadership in an organization? Focus an organization with sharp goals and tight accountability, and you get passive or alienated workers. Go for decentralized creativity, and you get drift and inertia. The key to achieving a simultaneously tight-loose organization lies in purposeful peer interaction. In this model, leaders create the conditions for effective interaction and intervene when necessary but otherwise let the group find its own balance.

Peer interaction is much more than mere collaboration; it is the social and intellectual glue of an organization. Successful education strategies endorse intraschool collaboration, in which teachers work with and learn from each other. But there are now initiatives in which schools learn from each other (as when schools work in clusters or when urban schools are twinned). In other strategies school districts learn from each other. This is called lateral capacity building.

③ SECRET THREE: CAPACITY BUILDING PREVAILS

Problems get solved when people believe that they will not get punished for taking risks. Bullying is not a good way to motivate people. When it comes to complex tasks, capacity building always trumps judgmentalism.

Individuals and groups are high in capacity if they are



developing knowledge and skills; if they attract and use resources wisely; and if they are committed to getting important things done collectively and continuously.

How do you work on capacity building? Start by attracting talented people and then help them develop, individually and collectively. In other words, leaders seek people who are not only *individually* talented but also *system* talented—that is, they can work within and keep developing cultures of purposeful collaboration.

According to the recent McKinsey report, top performing school systems built higher capacity and got better student outcomes “by making entry into teaching training highly selective, developing effective processes for selecting the right applicants, and paying good starting compensation. Getting these essentials right drove up the status of the profession, which allowed it to attract even better candidates.”



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4 SECRET FOUR: LEARNING IS THE WORK

Organizations must consistently address their core tasks, while at the same time learning to improve what they do. Learning on the job, day after day, is the work.

The intent of standardization is not to make work highly repetitive. Rather, its goal is to define the best practices for those few elements that are crucial to success. In most cases, write Liker and Meier, “the critical aspects of any work equal about 15 to 20 percent of the total work” (2007). The key is to identify those aspects and to take special care that everyone does those tasks well using the known best method of doing so. And “for these times there is no acceptable deviation from the defined method.”

You can achieve consistency and innovation only through learning in context. If people are not learning in the specific context in which the work is done, they are inevitably learning superficially. My colleague Richard Elmore (2004) has witnessed this principle in operation in school reform: “The problem [is that] there is almost no opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and substantial learning about their practice in the setting in which they actually work, observing and being observed by their colleagues in their own classrooms and classrooms of other teachers in other schools confronting similar problems of practice.”

Workshops and courses won’t do the trick. In fact there is no trick: You can achieve consistency and innovation only through deep and consistent learning in context.

5 SECRET FIVE: TRANSPARENCY RULES

The first reason that transparency rules is that it’s going to, whether we like it or not. Easy access to information means that the public’s appetite for accountability cannot be thwarted.

The second reason it rules is that transparency is a good

thing; in fact, it is essential to success. Yes, we all know that data can be misused. Public reporting of student results can lead to unfair or destructive actions. However, the alternatives—to keep information private or to refuse even to collect it—are neither acceptable nor useful.

Effective organizations embrace transparency. We know that people will cover up problems if the culture punishes them. So one thing we must do is develop cultures in which it is normal to experience problems and solve them as they occur. When data are precise, presented in a nonjudgmental way, considered by peers, and used for improvement as well as for external account-

ability, they serve to balance pressure and support.

Knowing that transparency is both inevitable and desirable for successful organizations makes it far less threatening.

6 SECRET SIX: SYSTEMS LEARN

So how do systems learn? First, they focus on developing many leaders working in concert. A key reason why organizations fail to sustain learning is that they focus on individual leaders. As these leaders come and go, the company engages in episodic ups and downs.

Second, systems learn when they are led by people who approach complexity with both humility and faith that effectiveness can be maximized under any circumstances. Leaders must be confident that they have considered all possibilities and have made the right choice under the circumstances, even though something may go wrong.

The best way to keep these secrets is to share them. If you practice these secrets, you are modeling them for others and developing more leaders who understand and use them. Implementing these strategies and developing new leaders become one and the same. Once you have a culture of leaders at all levels operating in this way, they reinforce each other as they go. By putting the secrets into action, you will inspire effective action from others. @

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